

## CHAPTER 12

# MUHAMMAD AND THE RISE OF ISLAM

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### PRE-ISLAMIC ARABIA

Traditionally, scholars have drawn a firm distinction between south Arabia (especially the south-western corner which corresponds to modern Yemen) and the rest of the peninsula. Although, as we shall see later, it is unhelpful to draw too crude a division between south and north, the dichotomy is essentially dictated by geography: most of Arabia in late antique times consisted predominantly of vast areas of desert, fringed with oases, whilst the southern part of the peninsula, the 'Arabia Felix' of the ancients, was blessed with abundant and regular rainfall and could support a highly developed agriculture, underpinned by extensive and elaborate irrigation systems.

South Arabia was thickly populated, its inhabitants were largely sedentarised and agriculturalist from around the eighth century BC and its towns had provided a milieu conducive to the development of political institutions and material culture. A few kingdoms or city-states, such as Ma'n, Saba', Qataban and Hadramawt, stand out from the blurred outlines of south Arabian history, based as it is on oral tradition. Such states could enjoy brief periods of independent power or could become united for a while, as was the case with the kingdom of Himyar around the beginning of the fourth century AD.<sup>1</sup>

Reliable information about the south Arabian kingdoms is only fragmentary. Classical authors waxed lyrical about the fabled luxury of the Sabaeans (and notably the Queen of Sheba). In spite of the still insecure chronologies of south Arabian rulers, archaeological evidence bears clear witness to a mature urban culture in the area. Indeed, the south Arabians were skilled architects and left behind a vast array of monumental inscriptions, as well as statues inspired by the art of Greece and Rome and the famous irrigation works at Marib, first mentioned in the eighth century BC, which were praised in

<sup>1</sup> For a clear overview of the history of pre-Islamic Arabia, Lammens (1928); Serjeant (1967); Shahid (1970).

antiquity as an engineering wonder. The irrigation provided by the dam in its heyday produced two fertile oases, which may well have comprised *in toto* some 10,000 hectares of arable land and must have supported a substantial population. Recent German archaeological excavations in the Marib area have in fact demonstrated from epigraphic evidence that the dam broke on at least four major occasions (c.370, 449, 450 and 542 AD) before its final 'collapse' (or moment when no further repairs were attempted) at some point before the advent of Islam. The inherent flaw in the dam, namely the accumulation of silt, was not understood by those who constructed and repaired it. The dam was not therefore designed to cope with this problem, and the strategies to which the pre-Islamic engineers resorted – namely raising the height of the dam but having to use increasingly thinner courses of masonry to do so – were bound to be merely palliative. Each time the dam broke, widespread economic hardship and population shifts must have occurred. These would have had a disruptive domino effect on adjoining territories, and the shock waves of the disaster would in time have been felt in the far north of Arabia and beyond, notably in the form of successive tribal displacements.<sup>2</sup> The bursting of the Marib dam in Saba is in fact enshrined in Islamic tradition, a moment symbolising the decline of the south Arabian kingdom.

So much for the civilised south-western corner of Arabia. The remainder of the peninsula presented a sharp contrast in many ways. Here, human life was dominated by the desert and the pressing need to adjust to its rigours. The inhabitants of this vast desert, predominantly pastoralists, led a precarious existence based on the domestication of the camel and the cultivation of the date palm. The Bedouin nomads were hardy and resourceful, working as camel-herders deep into the desert or as sheep-rearers closer to the agricultural areas around the oases, such as Yathrib, later to be called Medina, and Khaybar. Here, farmers grew dates and wheat. Camel nomadism had developed in Arabia over many centuries. As the famous fourteenth-century Muslim thinker Ibn Khaldun observed in his well-known analysis of nomad life, camel-herders had greater mobility than sheep-rearers and could cover wider expanses of land between watering holes.<sup>3</sup> The balance of power in the desert areas of the peninsula lay with the camel-herders, whose animals could support more people with meat, milk and hides. They lived in a symbiotic relationship with the semi-sedentarised agriculturalists of the oases, with whom they traded the products of nomad life in exchange for other wares, including weapons. Nevertheless, the camel-herders had the edge militarily, and periodically the farmers would buy protection from them.

<sup>2</sup> Brunner (1982–3), I and II; Glaser (1913).

<sup>3</sup> Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, trans. Rosenthal, p. 92.

The Arabs in north, central and eastern Arabia possessed no centralised government. Such a structure had existed only in peripheral areas, such as the kingdoms of Petra in Jordan and Palmyra in the Syrian desert, which had prospered in Roman times and had been profoundly influenced by classical culture. Bedouin society rejected authoritarian political concepts, being divided instead into egalitarian lineage groups. Such a 'tribal' organisation permeated the life of both pastoralists and farmers. Smaller or larger groups would recognise common ties and unite for economic and defensive reasons. To quote Ibn Khaldun on the Bedouin: 'Their defence and protection are successful only if they are a closely knit group of common descent.'<sup>4</sup> Tribes and clans (the terminology in the Arabic sources is very imprecise) would vary in size, structure and prestige. It is possible that wider tribal affiliations were acknowledged, but everyday life was probably based on smaller pragmatic groupings which shared encampments and watering places. Such groups were not rigidly structured, however, and were flexible enough to allow newcomers in or to reform according to circumstance. Nomadic groups often possessed their own recognised pasturing grounds, but these did not have fixed boundaries.

In principle, Bedouin society was egalitarian, although each tribal unit recognised a chief (*sharif* or *sayyid*) whose own status depended on his personal charisma. Such tribal leaders were both elected and hereditary, for a new chief would be drawn initially from an elite group within the tribe but nevertheless would be chosen outright on merit. His responsibilities included arbitration in disputes, the entertainment of guests, the defence of the tribe and the custody of its sacred symbols. Justice and restraint between tribal groups were achieved by a strict *lex talionis*: the honour of the whole group to which an injured person belonged required that they should exact equivalent retribution from the whole group of which the person who had committed the injury was a member. This process of mutual retaliation, which prevailed not only in the sedentarised areas such as Medina and Mecca but also amongst the desert nomads, could become protracted, until a suitable solution was found. Such a system, which gave each individual membership of a wider group, afforded him personal safety and protection for his dependants and his property.

The Bedouin tribesmen were armed; the exigencies of desert life often necessitated raiding (*ghazw*) the territory of other tribes or of the sedentary peoples. Indeed, this was a militarised society. The rules for *ghazw* had been laid down in ancestral tradition. In their dour desert environment the Bedouin tribesmen had long followed a code of manly virtue (*muruwwa*) in which the qualities of patient endurance (*sabr*), generous hospitality, courage and military prowess

<sup>4</sup> Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, trans. Rosenthal, p. 97.

were especially prized. This code of conduct was probably more important to them than any formal religious observance.

The religious customs of the Arabs in north, central and eastern Arabia are even more difficult to pinpoint with precision than those of the south. The cults of the Bedouin were animistic and varied; they worshipped stones, trees and idols. Muslim tradition speaks of the existence of soothsayers or sorcerers (*kahins*) in the pre-Islamic period; these men or women seem to have resembled the *shamans* of the Turkic world in some of their functions, possessing gifts of foretelling the future, healing and water-divining. They were not associated with specific deities. The Bedouin also acknowledged the sanctity of certain holy enclaves (*haram* or *hawta*).<sup>5</sup> Some of these sanctuaries functioned without guardians; others were organised by a hereditary religious elite. These holy enclaves became places of asylum and were used as a meeting place for the settling of disputes. The sanctuary itself and the area surrounding it were declared inviolable and killing, even fighting, was prohibited. Some sanctuaries acquired as it were tutelary deities. Thus the god Hubal was associated with the Meccan sanctuary, and the triad of goddesses, Allat, al-'Uzza (both normally identified with Venus) and Manat (the goddess of fate) were especially revered in the sanctuaries located near Mecca. Annual markets followed by pilgrimage ceremonies, including circumambulation in a ritually pure state, took place at these sites. These last three goddesses were elevated to the title of the 'daughters of Allah', the Creator God, whose importance was widely recognised within the peninsula. These goddesses formed part of the religious milieu of the Prophet's own tribe, the Quraysh, in his lifetime and are attacked in the Qur'an (53/19–23).<sup>6</sup>

It is difficult to evaluate the importance of the religious practices and beliefs of the pre-Islamic Arabs. The Bedouin did not fight in the name of specific deities. Nor did such deities provide them with prophets who propounded ethical codes. Such deities impinged very little on the everyday actions of the Bedouin, or on the rites and feuds of their tribal society. Life had simply to be endured with all its vicissitudes until, after his allotted span, man was struck down according to the inscrutable decrees of Fate.

This pessimistic *Weltanschauung* was common to oasis-dweller and nomad alike. They also shared other cultural norms, which transcended inter-tribal rivalries and fostered sentiments of all-embracing solidarity, unity and pride in being Arab. As already mentioned, during certain months of truce each year, Arabs from different parts of the peninsula would attend fairs before performing

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Serjeant (1981).

<sup>6</sup> 'Have ye thought upon Al-Lât and Al-'Uzzâ and Manât, the third, the other? . . . They are but names which ye have named', *The Quran*, trans. Pickthall, p. 549.

pilgrimage rites together. At such fairs a major attraction would be recitations of poetry, involving panegyric of the bard's own tribe and lampooning of their rivals. This time-honoured oral poetic tradition, retained intact by members of the tribe with prodigious memories, used a high form of Arabic. This was truly a *lingua franca*, which, in spite of numerous dialectal differences between the pre-Islamic Arabs, was understood by all and gave them a sense of shared identity and common heritage. Moreover, no matter how labile and pragmatic the realities of tribal affiliation may have been, it would appear that the pre-Islamic Arabs believed that they shared a common ancestry and, in the fifth and sixth centuries, the elements, at least, of an Arabic high culture in their poetry. Thus, if only in embryonic form, the Arabs possessed the linguistic and ethnic foundations on which Muhammad would be able to build his supra-tribal community. The factor that was to cement the edifice was Islam, the new monotheistic revelation from Arabia itself.

It is appropriate within a discussion of pre-Islamic Arabia to attempt to assess what inroads external religious traditions had made in the peninsula and to look more generally at outside influences on the milieu of Mecca, Muhammad's hometown. Were there special circumstances that led to the genesis of a new religion and a new community? First, it is clear that the Hijaz, the cradle of Islam, was not as isolated as later Muslim tradition would have it; this pious concept of Arabia as an area of ignorance and darkness highlights all the more brightly the glory of the new faith and its cultural manifestations. In fact, in the centuries immediately preceding Islam, the Hijaz was subject to a medley of external cultural and religious traditions and in turn reciprocally exerted its own influence on the adjoining territories.

Despite the geographical contrasts, it is simplistic to divide the Arabian peninsula crudely into the 'civilised' south-west corner and the 'backward' remainder. Too many scholarly hypotheses, even in recent times, have been based on such a dichotomy and have accordingly postulated static models for these pre-modern societies. The balance of power varied, and indeed the actual frontiers between sedentarised and nomadic areas were often shifting. The kingdoms of southern Arabia used the nomads (especially the Kinda tribe) from the central region as mercenaries; periodically the nomads would encroach on the territories of the south. Similarly, population movements northwards from south Arabia that took place as the southern kingdoms declined, must have changed the religious and social configuration of the rest of the peninsula and not merely its demography.

By the end of the sixth century AD, Judaism and Christianity had infiltrated the Arabian peninsula, especially the south-west, and the desert areas that bordered the Byzantine Empire. The conversion of the Negus of Abyssinia in the first half of the fourth century had produced a vigorous Christian state close

to south Arabia.<sup>7</sup> There is evidence of Christian communities in Aden in the fourth century. The famous Christians of Najran in fifth-century Hadramawt were in contact with the Monophysite Christians of Syria. Judaism was found in the oases of the Hijaz where its adherents successfully cultivated date-palm plantations. In south Arabia, prominent figures had been converted to Judaism. The king of Himyar, Yusuf As'ar, known in Muslim tradition as Dhu Nuwas, came to power around 510 and proselytised his Jewish faith in his domains; his zeal culminated in the massacre of the Christians of Najran. The Abyssinians, probably with Byzantine encouragement, crossed the Red Sea in 525, destroyed Dhu Nuwas and his kingdom and established a protectorate that lasted for around half a century. Abraha, an Abyssinian adventurer, subsequently took power in south Arabia and, according to Muslim tradition, made an expedition (mentioned obliquely in the Qur'an) as far as Mecca. A second colonising power, Sasanian Persia, also brought its official state religion, Zoroastrianism, to the shores of south Arabia. Around 570 to 575, the Persians occupied Himyar and some Zoroastrian conversions took place.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, the image of a religiously backward Arabia is inappropriate. To be sure, neither Judaism nor Christianity had taken a firm hold of the peninsula. Arabia had its own indigenous religious traditions but it was also subjected to the missionary activities of external colonial powers. The spread of Judaism and Christianity seems to have been piecemeal and uneven. In the Hijaz, the tribes in areas bordering Byzantine Syria had come under the influence of Christianity: some, such as the Ghassanids, had converted to the Monophysite creed, and – at a popular level – many would seek cures from the pillar saints of the Syrian desert. It may also be inferred from the frequent Qur'anic references to prophets common to the Judaeo-Christian tradition, and from the elliptical manner in which they are mentioned there, that the milieux of Mecca and Medina must have been very familiar with this religious background and that those to whom the Qur'anic message was first addressed had no need to be told in detail the stories of, for example, Joseph or Noah.

The Arabian peninsula was also capable of exerting its influence on the Fertile Crescent. Arabs had moved out of Arabia and into Byzantine territory. The power pendulum in Byzantium's eastern provinces as a result swung towards the non-Hellenised elements of the population who were often, moreover, of a different religious persuasion from their Byzantine overlords. Most of the inhabitants of Byzantine Syria and Egypt were Monophysites who used Syriac or Coptic in the liturgy. Their feeling of alienation from the Chalcedonian form of Christianity imposed from Constantinople was enhanced by discrimination and persecution.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Gibb *et al.* (1960), *Habashat*; see also Glaser (1895).

<sup>8</sup> Bosworth (1983), pp. 593–612.

Just before the Arab conquests began, the province of Syria was again under Byzantine control; the campaigns of Heraclius in the 620s (referred to obliquely in the Qur'an) are discussed elsewhere in this volume. These Byzantine military successes could not, however, stem the tide of Syrian urban decline, plague, depopulation and reversion to pastoralism. Heraclius simply did not have sufficient time to reimpose centralised control, to reorganise local defences, before the Arab invasions struck.

What of the other superpower, Sasanian Persia?<sup>9</sup> By the sixth century, the empire of the King of Kings (*Shahanshah*) covered the Iranian highlands and what is now Iraq. Its northern frontier with the lands of the Caucasus was established in the Araxes valley; to the east, the border town was Merv, beyond which lived the Turkic nomads of the steppes. To the south-east the empire stretched to Sistan, corresponding broadly with the frontier between Iran and Pakistan today. The disputed western frontier in eastern Anatolia and northern Syria shifted in accordance with the power struggles with Byzantium. In spite of its Persian origins, the Sasanian dynasty had placed its capital at Ctesiphon on the Tigris, near both ancient Babylon and the future site of Baghdad. Indeed, Iraq was the economic heart of the Sasanian Empire, providing some two-fifths of the imperial revenue. There were signs of tension in the sixth century between the centralised government structure of absolute monarchy, with its official religion, Zoroastrianism, elaborate bureaucracy and hierarchical class structure, on the one hand, and on the other the centrifugal forces of the nobility wishing to keep hold of provincial power. Khusraw I Anushirwan (531–579) brought about wide-ranging reforms designed to strengthen centralised, absolute government. In particular, his fiscal policy produced revenue for a regular army whose strength lay in its heavy cavalry, the cataphracts who had perfected their skills in Central Asia against the Turks. He also recruited nomadic Arabs as mercenaries.

These reforms did not, however, heal deep-rooted divisions and dissatisfactions within the Sasanian Empire and especially in Iraq. The Sasanian aristocracy itself was stratified; its upper echelons could on occasion try to wrest power from the King of Kings himself, whilst the lower gentry, the *dihqans*, were much less privileged and often liaised between the government and the peasantry. The religious situation in the Sasanian Empire was far from unified. It would appear that by the sixth century the state religion, a Zoroastrianism identified with conservatism, enjoyed only limited popular appeal. This was especially true in Iraq, where Christianity, particularly Nestorianism, had made considerable headway, even with the Persian upper class. Sasanian Iraq was also a dynamic centre of Jewish life in spite of periodic persecutions in the fifth and sixth centuries, and the Jews formed a large part of the population in town and

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Christensen (1944); also Frye (1984), pp. 116–80.

village. Most of the settled people of Iraq spoke Aramaic (the Persians were only a ruling minority there), whilst Arabic was the language of the Jazira and Hira. It can be seen, therefore, that the people of Iraq at least, the first Sasanian province to be subjected to the Arab military onslaught, were estranged religiously and ethnically from their Sasanian masters and that they would not be highly motivated towards defending the *ancien régime* once the Persian armies had been defeated by the incoming Arabs.

The period immediately preceding the Arab invasions had proved as disastrous for the Sasanian Empire as for Byzantium. Khusraw II Parviz (591–628) executed the last of the Arab Lakhmid kings, al-Nu'man, in 602 and removed this Sasanian-sponsored state that policed the Arab frontier. Probably as a consequence of the resumption of the war against Byzantium under Khusraw II Parviz and Heraclius' highly successful campaigns into Sasanian territory (627–628), the areas east of the Tigris became depopulated. Parts of Iraq were struck by plague, famine, floods and earthquakes. In the period between Khusraw's death in 628 and the eventual accession of Yazdagird III in 632, the year in which Muhammad died, ten claimants tried to seize the imperial throne. The Sasanian Empire was, indeed, seriously vulnerable.

It will be apparent from the preceding discussion that with the generally debilitated state of the two superpowers, the weakness of their frontiers and the internal urban decline of the provinces immediately adjoining Arabia, a power vacuum had developed. It ended with a shift of power towards the Arab nomads. The new conquerors were to come into a world that had undergone considerable changes even before they entered it, and they transformed it further. Within the Arabian peninsula itself too, by the time of the Prophet's career, it would appear that the balance of power lay with the nomads. They already held the ring between the seriously weakened superpowers in the march areas. They infiltrated southern Arabia, exploiting its weakness, already pinpointed by the external intervention of Abyssinia and Persia. Many of the nomads had shown little or no interest in the religions of Byzantium or Persia, possibly because they smacked of identifying with one or other superpower. The influence of Judaism was also probably limited. Islamic tradition often mentions *hanifs*, monotheists in Arabia,<sup>10</sup> who were not associated with Judaism or Christianity but who practised the pure religion of Abraham, the father of the Arabs, who founded the Ka'ba shrine at Mecca. It is debatable whether such a concept is a reflection of historical reality or a retrospective creation portending the forthcoming religion of Islam, which places uncompromising monotheism at its very core. Suffice it to say that the earlier monotheistic revelations of Judaism and Christianity were known widely to the Arabs but had

<sup>10</sup> Gibb *et al.* (1960), *hanif*.



not taken root. Arabia now offered fertile ground for a new religion that was to provide the basis of an unprecedented supra-tribal entity that would in turn integrate and channel nomad power. Muhammad came at a hinge of history. The preceding discussion of the historical setting may help our understanding of some of the factors – social, economic, territorial, religious, demographic – which contributed to the success of the Prophet's career and facilitated the spread of the new religious revelation. Nevertheless, the phenomenon of the rise of Islam defies simplistic explanations.

#### THE PROBLEM OF THE SOURCES

In spite of the vast mass of scholarly writings and the plethora of theories in recent times about the phenomenon of the rise of Islam and the early Muslim empire up to 750 AD, the structure of detailed 'facts' underpinning this phenomenon remains historiographically unsure. The career of the Prophet of Islam soon became the focus of Muslim pious tradition and sacred history: the important stages of his career on earth assumed symbolic significance. It is not 'fiction' or a distortion of historical truth that lies at the heart of the Muslim traditions about the rise of Islam, as some have alleged. It is the exemplary truth of the Prophet's career and the Islamic conquests, which is enshrined in the extant corpus of Muslim historiographical works on which the 'received' version of the rise of Islam is based. In other words, not just the sayings and opinions of Muhammad but also his actions, including the military campaigns, as observed and recorded by his Companions and their successors, became paradigms for the entire Muslim community. In time they were fleshed out with additional anecdotal material and with an apparatus detailing the process of transmission. Thus was fashioned an account of events whose components were, so to speak, interlocking and mutually supportive. The conquests, too, were integrated into this scheme of sacred history, and sacred history is not easily subject to alteration, whether in detail or in its grand sweep. But does this mean that one has to take it or leave it? We shall see that there are indeed some objective controls that can be applied to the information contained in the Muslim literary tradition, and that they tend to substantiate the general accuracy of the grand sweep of that tradition. Perhaps it is the paucity of such controls that has encouraged certain wholesale attacks on the validity of Muslim accounts of the rise of Islam;<sup>11</sup> but one should remember Carl Sagan's dictum that 'absence of evidence is not evidence of absence'. The events of c.620–c.660 AD, when seen as sacred history in the Muslim tradition, are immutable once they achieved their extant written form. These events, when presented in this way,

<sup>11</sup> Seminal are Crone and Cook (1977) and Wansborough (1978).

do not obey the laws of 'ordinary' history; they operate on a different level altogether. But that they do also enshrine actual historical events need not be doubted – and should not be doubted 'on principle' simply because they are presented in a religious guise.

To the core of sacred history were added (as we shall see) elements from oral tradition, or outright propaganda; these can be identified as extraneous. And of course the more distant events are from the life of the Prophet himself, the more they tend to fall into the category of 'straight' history. But for the study of the earliest decades of Islam the intractable problem remains: sacred history presents the past as a single solid block whose very diverse component parts have been transformed into an integrated whole and which repulses attempts at piecemeal analysis from within. A further dimension of the Islamic tradition needs to be mentioned here. The earliest information about the rise of Islam came from oral tradition. Memory in a tribal society is a finely tuned instrument, with experienced storytellers and poets performing extraordinary feats of narration and oratory. Yet the 'historical' time frame of a society with oral tradition is blurred and usually devoid of precise chronological points. Oral tradition cannot be used to reconstruct the exact sequence of events concerning a historical figure or detailed historical episodes. These remarks are absolutely *not* meant to imply that the corpus of extant Islamic historiographical material (dating mostly from the eighth and ninth centuries) was based on 'fiction'. As already mentioned, sacred history has normative significance, and key events and figures are endowed from an early stage with exemplary value for the faithful. Dating and details become fixed in hallowed tradition.

The received view of the rise of Islam given by the great Muslim historians of the 'Abbasid period (and above all, al-Baladhuri (d. 892) and al-Tabari (d. 923)) springs from the double inspiration of several generations of oral tradition (carefully memorised by the faithful anxious not to forget the contours of the Prophet's career and the glorious victories of the Islamic conquests) and the corpus of material inherited from the first written Islamic historical sources, now no longer extant. In a true sense some of the great 'Abbasid historians were 'compilers'; they were mostly religious scholars meticulously collecting and sifting nuggets of information, however fragmentary or full, left by their predecessors. Such snippets and anecdotes were furnished with an apparatus (the so-called *isnads* which traced the chain of narrators) intended to demonstrate the authenticity of the data mentioned. It is thus probable that although the first extant Islamic historical sources date from a period much later than many of the events they record, they do contain authentic earlier material. There can be no doubt that many traditionalists, acutely aware of the dangers of transmitting unreliable information, did not simply parrot the material they had inherited or collected, but took inordinate pains to verify

it, with the instincts of true historians. It is equally probable, indeed at times proven irrefutably, that the *isnad* apparatus, although interesting in a prosopographical sense, does not guarantee 'reliable' information. Other 'Abbasid historians, such as al-Ya'qubi (d. 897) and al-Mas'udi (d. 956), produced digests which are the result of selecting and interpreting earlier sources now lost. Thus within the Muslim tradition itself there are the makings of internal criticism of historiography, and of the verification of events by means of comparing one source with another.

It is a short step from hallowed reverence of sacred history to the exploiting of it for propagandistic purposes. The phenomenon of the early Islamic conquests lends itself easily to such an approach. The 'Abbasid historians were quick to seize the full propagandistic potential of the Muslim victories – both for the prestige of the 'Abbasid caliphs and for the glory of Islam. Military success was perceived as the manifestation of God's preordained will for man on earth, leading inexorably towards His perfected and final Revelation, Islam. An account of a famous battle often provides little concrete information, but is given layers of symbolic meaning with recognisable *topoi*, including highly stylised exchanges between the protagonists. The description of the battle of Qadisiyya given by al-Baladhuri is a typical example. The 'uncouth' Bedouin al-Mughira b. Sa'd, mounted on an emaciated horse and carrying a broken sword wrapped up in rags, is refused permission by the Sasanian cavalry to sit on the dais beside the 'civilised' Persian commander, Rustam. But the Muslim leader betters Rustam in the ensuing exchange: al-Mughira ignores Rustam's taunt that the Arabs have entered Sasanian territory, driven by economic hardship, and proudly claims that he and his companions have come to call the Persians to embrace Islam.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, accounts of the Muslim capture of individual cities often contain texts purporting to be the actual treaties of capitulation to the Muslims. These ostensibly provide dates, signatories, even the 'precise' amounts of poll-tax payable – but they should not be taken too literally.<sup>13</sup> Rather than being 'accurate' accounts, they seem to be idealised blueprints retrospectively attributed to the individual stages of the Muslim conquests. They reflect the preoccupations of legists in the 'Abbasid period engaged in the codification of the *Shari'a* (the Islamic Revealed Law) who wished to establish models of conduct based on the Qur'an and the *Sunna* (a term which eventually came to mean the idealised conduct of the Prophet).

The Qur'an itself is not easy to use as a historical source, although attempts have been made to extract from it the evolution of the Prophet's life. To be sure,

<sup>12</sup> al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-buldan*, trans. Hitti and Murgotten, p. 412.

<sup>13</sup> For example the agreement of Khalid b. Walid on the conquest of Damascus in 14 AH recorded in al-Baladhuri, p. 187.

by its condemnation of certain aspects of Arabian life, it sheds light on some of the prevailing social conditions and practices that the Prophet sought to reform, but to try to trace the successive stages of his career through Qur'anic allusions is apt to result in crude and simplistic conclusions. There is even considerable debate about the real chronology of its chapters. The *Hadith*, which incorporate the alleged words or deeds of the Prophet transmitted by his Companions and subsequent generations of early Muslims, have been used by Muslim scholars in conjunction with the Qur'an to clarify and amplify certain elliptical Qur'anic statements. The *Hadith* are, however, also difficult to use as a historical source. Their often fragmentary, parable-like nature makes it impossible to piece them together coherently. They faithfully reflect the fluidity, diversity and evolutionary aspects of early Islamic ritual and law and the efforts of the pious in the first two or three centuries of the Muslim era to establish the path of 'true Islam'. *Hadith* also form the basis for much of the 'received version' of the Prophet's life, the *Sira* (the hallowed biography compiled in the eighth century by Ibn Ishaq (d. 767) and revised by Ibn Hisham (d. 833)). Although it is overlaid with miraculous and legendary elements, it has formed the basis used by modern biographies of the Prophet, including those written by western orientalis. Aware of the historiographical problems associated with the *Sira*, problems that they analyse fully, they resort to its accounts only reluctantly in the virtual absence of any other sources.

Certainly the Muslim historiographical tradition, although difficult to use, should not be dismissed, not least because it is the main corpus of texts available on the rise of Islam and the early Muslim empire. Recently, attempts have been made to step outside the Muslim historiographical tradition and to try to construct the early history of Islam from non-Muslim sources. This approach, although exciting, has proved abortive – Christian and Jewish sources view the rise of Islam through a prism of misunderstanding and prejudice. They span a wide historical time frame too, often suffer from a half-digested understanding of the events mentioned and are as replete with anachronisms and ideological elements as the Muslim writings themselves. Above all, they are not objective enough to constitute a corrective to the Muslim tradition. Certainly, the evidence of seventh- and eighth-century Christian sources needs to be better known, reflecting as they do the context in which Christians were responding to the presence of Islam. However, it is dangerous in attempting to reconstruct the early development of Islam to place credulous reliance on the evidence of non-Muslim sources. Other questions, such as the possible interrelationship between Muslim, Jewish and Christian sources, still need further examination.

To what extent can the contemporary evidence of numismatics, papyri, archaeology and standing monuments shed light on the veracity of the traditional Muslim written accounts? If there is agreement between statements

made in the historical sources and the evidence of material culture, then is it not reasonable to adopt a more positive stance towards the value of the information contained in the Islamic historical sources? The evidence of surviving coins, for example, indicates clearly the transition between late antique and early Islamic modes of government.<sup>14</sup> The Arabs did not mint their own coins straightaway. Through an analysis of the evolutionary aspects of early Islamic coinage one may trace the handover of the mint, and all that it implies for government administration, from the Byzantine and Sasanian officials to Muslim ones. There is strong evidence that the existing division between Byzantium and Persia continued to be respected by the Arabs, that Byzantine and Sasanian coins continued in circulation after the Muslim takeover and that certain issues continued to be minted even when they were technically out of date and for use by the Muslims – the disproportionate number of coins in the name of Yazdagird III and Heraclius are revealing in this respect. The bilingual coins of the mid-seventh century, which used Greek or Pahlavi concurrently with Arabic, and the gradual evolution of an Islamic design for coins (removing crosses and fire-altars and substituting religious formulae such as the *Shahada* or the image of the standing caliph) demonstrate the growth of Islamic self-awareness and self-confidence, culminating in the coins of the last decade of the seventh century which bear testimony to the coin reforms and the establishment of Arabic as the official language of the Islamic empire, events recorded in the written histories. Numismatic evidence provides unbroken lists of provincial governors, for example in Iran and Iraq, and confirms textual information about administrative districts.

The surviving papyri are useful mainly for the last decade of the seventh century and the eighth century, although one of them, dated 643, confirms the beginning of the Muslim era as 622.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, a gravestone in Cairo (Museum of Islamic Art, no. 1508/20) in the name of one 'Abd al-Rahman b. Khayr is dated Jumada II 31/January–February 652.<sup>16</sup> An undated fragment of papyrus, written in Greek and found in the Negev desert by Israeli archaeologists, provides corroborative evidence of another kind. Its authenticity seems to be in no doubt. It mentions names and pay and would appear to be part of an army register (*diwan*); it thus provides documentary proof of an aspect of military administration well attested in the written sources.

As for architectural testimony, the most outstanding monument for the period under discussion is the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, with a foundation inscription of 72/692. Orientalist Qur'anic scholars have resolutely turned their faces away from the epigraphy of the Dome of the Rock, with its

<sup>14</sup> See for example Walker (1941a) and (1941b); Grierson (1960); Morony (1984), pp. 38–51.

<sup>15</sup> Grohmann (1952), p. 4. <sup>16</sup> Combe *et al.* (1931), p. 6.

240 metres of Qur'anic inscriptions.<sup>17</sup> Although this evidence was published by van Berchem as early as 1927, few Qur'anic scholars even mention it, let alone draw any conclusions from it. It is an urgent task for future research. So too is the luxury Qur'an recently discovered in the Yemen, now lodged in the House of Manuscripts in Sana'a; a carbon-14 test has yielded, with 95 per cent accuracy, the momentous date of 645–690 AD.<sup>18</sup>

What is the way forward? Those who subscribe to the theory of a historiographical 'black hole' for the early history of Islam express themselves very forcibly on this point and then settle down – evincing remarkably little awareness of the gross inconsistency involved – to reproducing the received Islamic view of the period in all its detailed amplitude. Rather than adopting this schizophrenic approach, one may proceed more cautiously and examine which parts of the Islamic historiographical edifice can be corroborated by external evidence – either from material artefacts or from non-Islamic written sources. When this approach is adopted, certain firm landmarks in the historical picture can be established. Exact dates and sequences for most of the events in the conquests of Islam will never be known, but the relatively early establishment of the new Islamic empire can be confirmed by a whole sequence of Arabo-Byzantine and Arabo-Sasanian coins produced in the early Umayyad period at scores of widely scattered mints. If some of the fixed points in the Islamic tradition can be proven from external evidence, then are there not grounds for a wider acceptance both of the general sweep of events which it records and of some, at least, of their more detailed points of interest?

It has been argued that the best way forward would be to synthesise the results obtained by archaeologists and by historians. This approach sounds very plausible but when it is examined critically it becomes apparent that the two strands do not mesh. Historians and archaeologists talk past each other because each has very different aims. Archaeology yields abundant detail about the kind of pottery people used, the kind of houses they lived in, and settlement patterns, but for the most part written Islamic sources have very little to say about such matters. Archaeology merely proves what common sense would indicate anyway, namely that there was continuity of daily life from late antique to Islamic times. Everything depends on the nature of the questions that are asked of this crucial period. Archaeology says virtually nothing about the microcosmic issues that have traditionally engaged most historians of the early Islamic period. But if the focus is henceforth to shift and to concern itself with macrocosmic issues such as living conditions in the villages and small towns of the Levant in the seventh and eighth centuries or the nature of settlement in steppe/desert areas and of their agricultural exploitation, then

<sup>17</sup> Kessler (1970).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. von Botmer (1987), pp. 4–20.

beyond doubt archaeology holds the key. This is especially true of the period 710–750, when most of the Umayyad desert residences were built. But all this has very little to do with the heady controversies of the 1970s. For those who call into question the overall accuracy of the traditional Muslim account of what actually happened between 600 and 650, archaeology provides little help – not least because of the lack of excavation in the key sites of Arabia, notably Mecca and Medina, and disputes about the dates of those early mosques which might reflect the revelation which caused the Prophet to shift the direction of prayer (*qibla*) from Jerusalem to Mecca.

#### THE CAREER OF MUHAMMAD

The sacred ‘bricks’ in the traditional edifice of the Prophet’s life are immutably fixed in the Muslim consciousness and have been hallowed by generations of piety. In the Muslim view, Muhammad’s career is not an appropriate subject for historical enquiry. The historian is nevertheless faced with the phenomenon of a new world religion and empire that emanated directly from Muhammad. Any historical analysis, however tentative, must therefore begin with his life and should attempt at least to discern its major landmarks. The brief account that follows is based on traditional Muslim sources; where appropriate, the testimony of non-Muslim writings will also be mentioned.

The Prophet’s birth cannot be securely dated either from Muslim or from external sources, although it was probably in the 570s. He was born in Mecca into a minor branch of the Quraysh tribe, the Banu Hashim, a clan of some prestige but whose wealth and political power had declined after the 570s. Orphaned early (Qur’an 93/6 is clear proof of this),<sup>19</sup> he was raised by his uncle, Abu Talib. As a young adult, Muhammad became involved in commerce, working for a rich widow, Khadija, whom he subsequently married (the Byzantine historian Theophanes writing in the early ninth century mentions both Muhammad’s orphanhood and this marriage).<sup>20</sup> The union produced seven children, only one of whom, Fatima, survived into adulthood and was the mother of Muhammad’s grandsons – Hasan and the more famous Husayn.

In his middle years (traditionally fixed at around the age of forty) Muhammad began to withdraw from Mecca to meditate for prolonged periods on Mount Hira, where he received his first revelations from God. These overwhelmed him in their impact. After initial self-doubts and with the whole-hearted support of Khadija, he became increasingly persuaded of the truth of

<sup>19</sup> ‘Did He not find thee an orphan and protect (thee)?’, trans. Pickthall, p. 656.

<sup>20</sup> Theophanes, *Chronographia*, trans. Turtledove, p. 34.

his divine call. Around 613 he felt compelled to begin preaching to his fellow Meccans. The initial prophetic message, which forms the earliest Meccan chapters (*suras*) of the Qur'an, stresses the imminence of the Last Day and man's urgent need of repentance. The Qur'anic language is infused with dramatic intensity, gripping those who hear it. Its message, however, fell on deaf ears. Nevertheless, Muhammad was able to gather around himself a small group of enthusiastic converts, who 'surrendered themselves to God' (the meaning of the word *muslim*). The revelations continued. The rift with the polytheistic Meccans intensified, as the uncompromisingly monotheistic emphasis of Islam (evident from the middle Meccan *suras* onwards) became more pronounced. The Muslims were persecuted by the Meccans and some of them, according to Islamic tradition, moved around 615 to Abyssinia, where they were protected by the Negus. At this stage, however, Muhammad still had the support of his clan and its leader, his uncle Abu Talib. A major turning point for Muhammad came in 619 with the deaths of Khadija and Abu Talib; another uncle of his, Abu Lahab, the new leader of the clan, would not tolerate his activities. Bereft of protection, Muhammad was now obliged to seek a different centre in which to propagate Islam.

He was approached around 620 by some inhabitants of Yathrib who invited him to arbitrate in their crippling internal disputes. He eventually accepted their offer and entered the town (soon renamed *Madinat al-nabi* – the city of the Prophet – and known thereafter as Medina) on 24 September 622. Later, when the Muslim calendar was introduced, this date marked the beginning of the Islamic era, commemorating Muhammad's *hijra* ('emigration') from Mecca to Medina. A papyrus from the year 643 and dated 'the year 22' seems to confirm 622 as the beginning of a new era. In Medina the Arabs were divided into two main, mutually hostile tribal groups, the Aws and the Khazraj. Also living there were three principal Jewish clans, the Qurayza, al-Nadir and Qaynuqa. It is difficult to determine either the exact 'ethnic' identity of these 'Jewish' elements (were they Arabic-speaking Jews or Judaicised Arabs?) or what kind of Judaism they practised. What seems certain, however, is that they played an important role in the economic life of Medina and were in touch with Jewish groups in other parts of Arabia. They may well have been responsible for familiarising the Arabs of Medina with monotheistic concepts and biblical stories. The next decade (622–632) in Medina provided the Prophet with an opportunity to preach freely, to worship openly and to create a theocratic Islamic community (*umma*). The newcomers, the Meccan Muslims (the so-called Emigrants – *muhajirun* – a form of this term is used in the earliest Greek and Syriac sources) who had arrived in Medina without resources or support, needed to be integrated into Medinan society. This problem was solved initially by the system of 'brotherhood', established by Muhammad between individual



Emigrants and the Medinan Muslims (the so-called Helpers – *Ansar*). A document known as the Constitution of Medina<sup>21</sup>, the authenticity of which seems secure, is preserved in Ibn Ishaq. Dating from the second or third year of the Medinan period, it reveals Muhammad's great skills as an arbitrator and his attempts to weld the heterogeneous elements of Medinan society into a unified community. The text shows that even at this early stage the ethos of the *umma* was clearly Islamic – the highest authority is supra-tribal and belongs to God and His prophet Muhammad – but the Constitution allowed also for the inclusion of Jews and polytheists and suggests that Muhammad was not yet uncontested leader in Medina. However, the pragmatic outlook of this document was soon superseded, as the Prophet's position became strengthened and the need for an exclusively Muslim community became paramount.

As Muhammad laid the foundations of the *umma*, the Qur'anic revelations continued; the Medinan chapters are longer pronouncements on the conduct of the Muslims in every aspect of their personal and communal lives. It is difficult to chart with chronological precision the internal evolution of the Medinan period but it is clear that Muhammad's early attempt to gain acceptance of the Islamic revelation from the Medinan Jews whom he wished to include within the community met with rejection. His familiarity with both Jewish and Christian scriptures is mentioned by Theophanes. However, the Qur'anic message reveals an increasing disenchantment with the Jews and a heightened emphasis on the exclusivity and originality of the new faith, Islam. The Qur'an also speaks of Hypocrites (*munafiqun*), subversive, disloyal elements within the community, who threatened to destroy it.

As well as building a harmonious community from within, Muhammad had to fend off external attacks from the Meccans who threatened the very existence of the *umma*. Islamic tradition records his struggle against the Meccans in a series of battles that have become the prototype of *jihad*, itself defined by Muslims as a defensive struggle against external aggression. His successful struggle against the enemy from without was accompanied by a sharpening of his resolve to remove dangerous elements from within Medina, above all the Jews. The Muslims' first major victory against the Meccans, the battle of Badr in 624, damaged Meccan prestige and provided a vital boost to Muslim morale, a potent proof of the new faith's veracity. Thereafter, Muhammad banished the Jewish clan of Qaynuqa from Medina; their possessions became the property of the *umma*. A year later, although the Meccans defeated the Muslims at the battle of Uhud, they did not succeed in ousting Muhammad. Soon afterwards he moved against the second Jewish group, Nadir, and banished them to Khaybar and other Jewish settlements. In 627 the Meccans' attempt to take Medina by

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Serjeant (1964b), pp. 3–16.

force failed at the so-called Battle of the Ditch. Thereafter, Muhammad dealt with the remaining Jewish group, Qurayza: the men were executed and the women and children enslaved.

Muhammad now established absolute authority within Medina and turned his attention to Mecca. Ideally, he preferred to integrate his home town peacefully into the *umma*, which soon included some of the tribes from the area around Medina; these were won over by astute negotiation and alliances rather than by military force. The foundations for a peaceful entry into Mecca were laid within two years. At the same time the community's horizons widened to include some Arab tribes on the fringes of the Syrian desert whom Muhammad summoned to embrace Islam and submit to the authority of the *umma*. In 628 he announced his wish to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca. In the event he reached al-Hudaybiyya on the outskirts of the Meccan *haram* and concluded a truce with the Meccans, allowing him to enter the city the following year. Shortly afterwards, Muhammad captured the Jewish oasis of Khaybar. The Prophet's conduct on this occasion – he allowed the inhabitants (who were 'People of the Book' with established scriptures) to remain there and to practise their faith on payment of an annual poll-tax (*jizya*) – formed the model for subsequent treatment of conquered peoples. In 629, in accordance with the truce of al-Hudaybiyya, the Meccans vacated their city for three days while the Muslims performed the '*umra* (the lesser pilgrimage). At this stage the Meccans still refused Muhammad's offers of reconciliation. In January 630, Muhammad made a triumphal entry into Mecca, which surrendered peacefully to him. Some weeks later he defeated a large hostile army of central Arabian tribes at al-Hunayn.

The remainder of his life – a mere two years – was spent in Medina, consolidating his policy of securing the northern routes to Syria and expanding the *umma*. Already in 629 he had sent a large force under his adopted son Zayd towards Palestine. This expedition proved abortive. The momentum of expansion was, however, sustained. Muhammad himself took part in a Syrian campaign to Tabuk in 630. In that year numerous tribal delegations came to agreements with the Prophet, probably implying on their part varying degrees of commitment, religious and political, to the *umma*.

In 632 the Prophet performed the Farewell Pilgrimage in Mecca – this time following the full rites of the *hajj*, which became the model for future Islamic practice – and on his return to Medina made preparations for an ambitious expedition across the Jordan, which he himself intended to lead. Shortly before the campaign's departure, he fell unexpectedly and seriously ill. He died on 8 June 632 (Theophanes puts the date a year earlier).<sup>22</sup> By his death most of

<sup>22</sup> Theophanes, trans. Turtledove, p. 34.

Arabia owned his sway. The foundations of the new faith, Islam, had been laid. A dynamic community had been created, which was shortly to burgeon into a vast world empire. This was made possible through the towering figure of the Prophet, through his remarkable qualities of leadership and charisma, the memory of which inspired his followers to carry on the enterprise he had initiated. Whilst noting the exemplary nature of the Prophet's character and career in the religious life of the Muslims, it is important to stress that he viewed himself as only a man and that his contemporaries also viewed him thus. He was the vehicle through which divine revelations came. At the same time he was able to make the revelations the basis of actions and to organise a society capable of perpetuating the new faith.

What were the salient characteristics of 'early Islam', the pristine faith preached and practised by the Prophet? This is not easy to chart from the evidence of the Qur'an, which is a work of revelation and not organised on a thematic basis. It is, however, the most valuable source for determining the evolution of Islam. Revealed as it was in successive stages, it mirrors the internal defining of Islam as an all-embracing faith and way of life and the progression by which Islam distanced itself from Judaism and Christianity, on the one hand, and the pre-Islamic polytheistic milieu on the other. Islam came to emphasise the uncompromising oneness of God, in sharp contrast both to Arab idolatry and to the Christian doctrines of Jesus' divinity and the Trinity. God is transcendent, omnipotent, omniscient, the Supreme judge; yet He is closer to man than his own jugular vein. Early Islam shared features with other Near Eastern monotheistic faiths: in common with Syriac Christianity, the Day of Judgement is terrifyingly imminent, whilst, as in Judaism, Muslims prayed towards a Holy City and emphasised the importance of fasting. But in spite of a common heritage Islam is viewed as the completion and perfection of preceding revelations.

At the outset of his preaching, it would appear that Muhammad saw himself as a prophet, one of a long line of figures shared by the Jews and Christians, who came to 'warn' successive generations that they had strayed from the right path, that God's judgement was imminent and that there was urgent need for repentance. The Qur'an evokes the dire punishments of Hell in memorable imagery. If only man will survey the wondrous signs of God's handiwork, he will surely acknowledge God's omnipotence. The Meccan *suras* also stress the importance of frequent prayer and of charity towards the poor. Gradually the attacks on Meccan polytheism increase; the Ka'ba belongs to Allah, the one true God. When the Meccans refused to heed this message, the Qur'an speaks of the terrible fate that awaited earlier generations who ignored their prophets.

As we have seen, the rift with Judaism became wider in the Medinan period. Initially Muhammad made the 10th of Muharram a day of fasting for the

Muslims (cf. Yom Kippur) and at some point he adopted the practice of turning towards Jerusalem for prayer. Friday became the day for the congregational service, held in the courtyard of Muhammad's house. When the message he preached failed to receive recognition from the Jews of Medina, this crisis led to further redefining of the new faith; the Jews had received only part of the Revelation (Qur'an 4/44). In the second year after the Hijra (623–624) the direction of prayer was changed from Jerusalem to the Ka'ba (Qur'an 2/142–150). The Qur'an also stresses Abraham's role as the Arabs' forefather and as the first Muslim (3/67). The Prophet was to restore the Ka'ba, founded by Abraham (2/125), to its pristine monotheism. In the early Medinan period the rift with Arab polytheism also became sharper. The new faith should replace and transcend both blood loyalty (2/216) and ancient polytheistic rituals, such as the taboo on fighting in the sacred months (2/217).

The role of the pilgrimage as a pillar of Islam was established during the Prophet's lifetime; the Ka'ba became a focal point in the transmuted Muslim *hajj*, through the paradigmatic conduct of the Prophet in his last year. Indeed, by the time of his death, the five pillars of Islam – the profession of faith, fasting, prayer, almsgiving and pilgrimage – were in place. The Qur'anic revelations were being used in early Muslim worship and memorised by the faithful. Like Moses before him, Muhammad, the 'seal of the Prophets', was involved in social action as well as preaching. His message and his activities in Medina emphasised brotherhood and mutual solidarity but the *umma* was a supra-tribal entity based on new Islamic criteria.

For whom did the Prophet intend the message of Islam? The issue continues to be debated. Strong arguments have been made in support of the view that he considered his mission to be for all mankind, not just the Arabs. Conversely, it could be argued from Qur'anic evidence that he was working within his own milieu and that his mission was intended for the Arabs. The authenticity of letters from the Prophet to various potentates of the time, including the Byzantine and Sasanian emperors and the Negus of Abyssinia, inviting them to embrace Islam, has rightly been called into question. It is, however, likely that the Prophet was in regular contact with local rulers whose territories touched Arabia and that he intended to spread Islam to Arabs on the borders or already within Byzantine and Sasanian territories. This is clearly demonstrated by the Muta episode and by his own participation in the Tabuk campaign of 630.

#### THE CONQUESTS OF ISLAM, 632–711

The formation of the Islamic empire, which followed the death of the Prophet in 632, falls conveniently but not rigidly into two phases. The first was an explosive and surprisingly easy series of conquests of the territories closest to

Arabia, which soon brought Byzantine Syria, Palestine and Egypt as well as Sasanian Iraq into the orbit of government from Medina. The second involved protracted and more difficult conquests that eventually added Sasanian Iran and parts of Central Asia in the east and the North African littoral in the west. The year 711 is a convenient date at which to fix the conquest of both extremities of the Islamic empire, Spain and India; that year established the boundaries of the Islamic polity that were, broadly speaking, to remain unchanged until the eleventh century.<sup>23</sup> By the early eighth century, the Arab Muslim empire had reached the limits of its military and administrative viability and the wave of successful conquests was to subside – a turning point traditionally marked in the West by the battle of Poitiers in 732 or 733, the importance of which has been grossly inflated but which came to symbolise the beginning of a new phase of Muslim territorial withdrawal and consolidation. As a result of Muslim expansion, in the period 632–711, the Sasanian Empire was ‘wiped out as if it had never been’ (Ibn Khaldun).<sup>24</sup> The Byzantine state, although greatly diminished and stripped of its Levantine possessions, lived on to fight another day, in spite of several determined but abortive Muslim attacks on Constantinople made during the period. Thereafter, the Arabs ceased to have the Byzantine capital as a major focus of their aspirations.

The first external conquests conducted under the banner of Islam were remarkably swift and successful. These took place at the same time as the first caliph, Abu Bakr, was trying to subdue the whole Arabian peninsula. Indeed, these two activities, the beginning of conquest of Byzantine and Sasanian territory and the acquisition of firm control within the peninsula itself, both form part of the first external thrust of the new Islamic polity in Medina, aimed at spreading its faith and hegemony. The reigns of the first two caliphs, Abu Bakr (632–634) and ‘Umar (634–644), saw the subjugation of the whole of Arabia, the Levantine provinces of Byzantium and Sasanian Iraq. From the outset, the Medinan leadership seems to have realised the importance of continued military momentum, both for the survival of a unified *umma* and for the extension of its territories. The exact chronology of the first phase of the conquests and the contribution made by individual Muslim leaders are impossible to reconstruct accurately. Even the dates of key battles and of the capitulation of important cities are disputed. Yet the general sweep of Muslim victory is incontestable. Initially, raids were often conducted on two or more fronts simultaneously. They were not always sanctioned or instigated by the caliph at Medina. The problem of communications grew as the distances covered by Muslim armies increased. Certain generals, such as ‘Amr b. al-‘As

<sup>23</sup> For recent secondary works on the Islamic conquests, Donner (1981); Kaegi (1992).

<sup>24</sup> Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddinah*, trans. Rosenthal, p. 1.

and Khalid b. al-Walid, acted on occasion on their own initiative. Even in the earliest phases of Muslim expansion there were temporary setbacks and the Arabs had sometimes to make several attempts to capture individual cities, such as Damascus and Alexandria. Generally, however, the Arabs held on to the territories conquered and began to create a primitive infrastructure for administering the new territories.

Sasanian Iraq proved an easy target for the Muslim armies. According to the traditional Muslim accounts, the chief of the Bakr tribe, Muthanna b. al-Harith, exploited the vulnerable Sasanian frontier, supported by contingents from Medina under the leadership of 'the Sword of Islam', Khalid b. al-Walid. After taking Hira, the Arabs inflicted a heavy defeat on a Sasanian army at the battle of Qadisiyya (636) and built two fortified bases, Basra and Kufa, from which to spearhead conquests further east. With their subsequent capture of the Sasanian capital, Ctesiphon, and a further victory at Nihawand in 642, the Arabs soon became masters of Sasanian Iraq and west and central Iran. The last Sasanian emperor, Yazdagird III, retreated as far as Khurasan where he died in 651.

Like the Arab conquest of Sasanian Iraq, the annexing of Byzantine Palestine and Syria was brought about initially by the actions of those Arab tribes nearest to the frontier, reinforced by contingents sent by the caliph at Medina. The decisive engagements with the Byzantines seem to have been the victory at Ajnadayn in 634, after Khalid had made his fabled crossing of the waterless desert from Iraq to Syria, and the battle of Yarmuk, dated by Theophanes to 23 July 636. Damascus and Jerusalem fell by 638, and with the capture of Caesarea in 640 the conquest of Syria and Palestine was complete. Before 'Umar's death in 644, the Arab armies had penetrated Armenia but had not yet crossed the Taurus mountains into Asia Minor. The conquest of Egypt was achieved by another great Muslim general, 'Amr, who moved into lower Egypt (639), defeated the Byzantine army at Heliopolis (640) and negotiated the capture of Alexandria (by 645). Thus ended the first phase of Muslim expansion. On Christmas Day 634 the patriarch Sophronius, preaching in Jerusalem, had seen the Arabs' taking of Bethlehem as divine punishment for Christian sin and urged repentance in order to defeat the 'Ishmaelites', but such initial optimism on the Byzantine side soon receded. Indeed, in a letter dated between 634 and 640 Maximos the Confessor, the Byzantine theologian, showing greater realism, speaks of 'a barbaric nation from the desert having overrun a land not their own'.<sup>25</sup>

The Arabs' preferred mode of movement was by land, ideally in desert country. But the caliphate of 'Uthman witnessed an important new

<sup>25</sup> On Maximos, see Louth, chapter 11 above.

development – the first Muslim naval expedition led by the Umayyad governor of Syria, the future caliph Mu‘awiya. Cyprus was taken in 649, initial raids were conducted against Sicily and in 655 the Arabs won a naval victory over the Byzantine fleet off the Lycian coast (the Battle of the Masts). The second phase of conquest, however, lasted more than sixty years. It might be argued that the initial élan had gone, that the conquerors had much to organise in the new territories and that the progress of further conquests would inevitably be slower than in the decade after Muhammad’s death. Other factors contributed to the more protracted struggle to gain control of points west of Egypt and east of Iraq. Internal dissensions at the heart of the new Islamic community preoccupied the caliphs and undermined the triumphal advance of Muslim hegemony. Local conditions also hindered Muslim military leaders. The Arab conquest of Byzantine North Africa, spearheaded from Egypt, was fraught with pitfalls. Even a superficial Arabisation of the coastal strip from Libya westwards to the Atlantic was to take until the end of the seventh century. A natural boundary to the south was provided by the Atlas mountains. Their gradual progress westward arose as a natural extension of the conquest of Egypt. A new factor in North Africa was local resistance, successfully organised by the indigenous Berbers, with or without support of Byzantine military units. Yet, in time the Berbers converted to Islam; indeed, the Muslim army that eventually crossed over the Straits of Gibraltar (in 710–711) was predominantly Berber, with Arab leadership. Berber conversion to Islam was not, however, swift or uniform. The earliest extant Muslim historiography which focusses on the conquest of North Africa comes from the Egyptian historian Ibn ‘Abd al-Hakam (d. 871), who collected tales based largely on oral tradition. His underlying aim was to legitimise the Muslim conquests of Egypt and North Africa. Reference is made to two semi-legendary Berber figures, the warrior Kusayla and the aged queen Kahina, around whom the opposition to the incoming Muslim invaders centred. Although precise chronologies are not available, it appears that as the Arabs moved along the North African littoral the composition of their armies changed to include increasing numbers of Berber contingents attracted to Islam, if not initially by its precepts, at least by the prospect of booty and regular pay. An important new garrison town, Qayrawan (in present-day Tunisia), was built in 670 and became the base for further conquests westwards. The Muslims’ conquest of Spain (al-Andalus) followed naturally from their presence in Morocco and was achieved with great ease. By 720 all the major cities of southern Spain, including Granada, Seville and Córdoba, had fallen.

At the other extremity of the Islamic world, the conquest of the Iranian plateau also proved slower. Nevertheless, the easternmost province of the empire, Khurasan, was colonised early by Arab settlers and became a key base

for raids into central Asia.<sup>26</sup> In the east, the battle of Talas (751) against the Chinese became identified as the moment at which Arab Muslim territorial expansion halted in the east and consolidation of conquered territory began. From 711 the Arabs had also established a small Muslim presence in Sind in northern India. Thus, within a century after the death of the Prophet, the Arab Muslims ruled a mighty empire into which were integrated vast subject populations that had not yet accepted Islam, but the death knell of Zoroastrianism and North African Christianity had been sounded. Elsewhere in the empire – in Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Spain – Christian and Jewish communities would survive and retain their character and autonomy under Muslim rule.

Much ink has been spilt on the phenomenon of the Islamic conquests, but few firm conclusions can be drawn. Scholars have stressed the weakness of the Byzantine and Sasanian empires and the lack of policing on the borders with Arabia; they have alleged a degree of acquiescence or active complicity on the part of the subject populations of these empires, disaffected with their central governments; and they have adduced various combinations of religious, military, demographic and economic factors which contributed to the Arabs' remarkable success. It seems unlikely that the Arabs possessed military superiority over their opponents. Certainly, they had no secret weapon, no new techniques. Indeed, in some military spheres they were inexperienced; they allegedly learned siege warfare, for example, from the Persians. They were also unfamiliar with how to fight naval engagements. The nomadic Arabs were, however, militarised and hardy as a result of their lifestyle. They could cover enormous distances over difficult terrain, deriving advantage from their great familiarity with the desert and the riding camel. Perhaps above all, the early Muslim armies enjoyed good leadership from seasoned generals.

As already mentioned, profound demographic changes, conveniently focussed on the bursting of the Marib dam, must have occurred, causing populations to spill over into the Byzantine and Sasanian empires from the northern and eastern fringes of the Arabian peninsula. These factors cannot be ignored in the search for explanations but they do not account for the timing of the conquests so soon after Muhammad's death. The conclusion imposes itself that the religious impetus must have played a key role in the early military successes and that it gave the Arabs an ideological edge over their foes. Without this impetus the achievements of the Muslims would have been ephemeral and localised. Initially, those genuinely fired by Islam probably formed a small elite of people who had been privileged to work close to Muhammad. This inner core moulded the religious, political and social framework of the community. Islam provided the *raison d'être* of the embryonic Arab state. Instead

<sup>26</sup> Gibb (1923).



of the time-honoured patterns of Bedouin border raiding followed by a return to Arabia, or of Bedouin integration into frontier localities under the thumb of the Byzantine and Sasanian empires, Muslim rule was now imposed from Medina and the Bedouin settled in custom-built garrison towns in the territory of the former super-powers. It seems unlikely, however, that the rank and file nomads who comprised the earliest Muslim armies were propelled into fighting principally out of religious zeal. Their knowledge of Islam must have been very superficial. Islamic sources themselves stress that inducements of booty and financial remuneration kept the Arab warriors loyal. Gradually, success after success must have engendered greater solidarity and higher morale. Once the Arab tribal contingents were housed in the new garrison towns, it became an important facet of military life to receive instruction in Islam and to 'live' the Muslim life corporately. Quranic recitation and the daily fulfilment of Islamic rituals helped to reinforce the sense of belonging to a movement destined by God to be crowned with success. Islam, conveyed through the unifying power of the Arabic language, enabled the Arabs to establish the most long-lasting of all empires set up by nomads.

Whilst these extraordinary military exploits and territorial gains were taking place in Byzantine and Sasanian lands, the embryonic Islamic state was developing at the heart of the *umma*. Internal disunity soon appeared. Indeed, it could be argued that true harmony existed only in Medina under the charismatic rule of Muhammad himself. His unexpected death in 632 left the community in disarray. Partisan historical sources obscure the true nature of the Prophet's own plans for succession. He left no male heirs and a number of worthy candidates felt they had good right to take on the task. According to the minority Shi'ite sources, Muhammad bequeathed authority to his cousin and son-in-law, 'Ali. The majority of Muslims, the Sunnis, believe that the decision to appoint Abu Bakr, the Prophet's father-in-law and devoted friend, as his successor (*khalifa*, 'caliph') was in accordance with the true wishes of Muhammad and with the consensus of the nascent Muslim community.

Islamic political thinkers have tended to view the period of the four so-called 'Rightly-Guided' caliphs (632–661) as a halcyon era of true theocracy. In reality, the sources reveal a paradox: tremendous vitality and expansion on the one hand and growing internal schism on the other. Three of these first four caliphs were assassinated. The caliphate of Abu Bakr, lasting only two years, was a caretaker government. Islamic sources credit 'Umar, the second caliph, who succeeded Abu Bakr on the latter's death in 634, with the establishment of true Islamic government. Many of the achievements attributed to him may well, however, be retrospective projections: the Islamic state must have acquired its distinctive form over a considerable time. Nevertheless, it is clear that 'Umar held the *umma* together by the force of his iron personality. After his death in

644, cracks in the edifice of the *umma* widened and the impetus of conquest was temporarily halted during the turbulent reigns of the third and fourth caliphs, 'Uthman (644–656) and 'Ali (656–661).

Early Islamic government was at once pragmatic and innovative. At the head of the state was the caliph, who appointed governors over individual provinces. These were usually based on the territorial units already existing under preceding regimes – Sasanian, Byzantine or Visigothic. The Muslims were content to use local administrative institutions (indeed, they were constrained to do so by their own administrative inexperience); this facilitated the gradual transfer of power to the newcomers. Even so, specifically Islamic modes of government probably came into being early. Initially, the empire was ruled from the seat of the caliphate, Medina, and later briefly Kufa, before moving to Damascus with the takeover of power by the Umayyads in 661. Before that date conquest was a fundamental pillar of the *umma*. Its warriors were entitled to a share of the booty; this was divided up on the spot in the case of movable property, one fifth being sent to the caliph to be spent on needy groups within the community and the remainder distributed to those who had participated in the fighting. Islamic tradition also gives 'Umar credit for the establishment of the *diwan*, the financial system, which paid military stipends and was based on a supra-tribal criterion, namely priority of conversion to Islam.

The 'People of the Book' (Christians, Jews, Sabians, Zoroastrians and, later, Buddhists) were granted the protection of the Islamic state, as well as freedom of worship, in return for payment of the poll-tax (*jizya*), which was collected with the help of the religious leaders of the non-Muslim communities. The early Islamic state demarcated the relationship between the rulers and the ruled. The caliphs derived fiscal benefit from their subject populations; more than this they did not want. Conversion to Islam was not apparently a significant factor. The new faith was for the Arabs at this early stage. The exclusivity of the *umma* was underlined by the physical separateness of their living quarters. The subject populations continued to dwell in long-established urban areas, whilst the conquerors generally lived in the newly constructed garrison towns, strategically sited near the open desert. It was not, however, in the interests of the Muslims to mete out harsh treatment to peoples much more numerous than themselves, peoples who could make valuable contributions to the Islamic state.

The process by which Sasanian Iraq came to terms with the conquerors can be documented in detail from the Islamic sources. The *dihqan* class was quick to negotiate with the Arabs to keep its lands. The chronicler al-Tabari also records that the local population of Iraq built bridges and served as scouts and soldiers for the Arabs. Some contingents of the Sasanian army, notably the group mentioned by al-Tabari as the *Hamra'*, converted to Islam and became

integrated into the Muslim army as allies of the Tamim tribe before and after the battle of Qadisiyya. Some *Hamra'* were infantry; they joined the Muslim side and settled in Kufa. Such new non-Arab converts, the *mawali* ('clients', so called because they had to become affiliated to an Arab tribe), made mangonels and helped the Arabs to learn the use of armour and the heavy Persian horse. Thus a picture emerges in which certain elements of the Sasanian population, both those with vested land interests and also military contingents, saw their survival in terms of a quick accommodation with the conquerors.<sup>27</sup>

Can a similar situation be postulated for the Byzantine Empire? Recent research reveals a complex picture and suggests that the population did not welcome the Arabs with open arms. It is certainly too simplistic to argue that local Monophysite Christians supported the Muslim conquerors because of their religious disaffection with Constantinople. There were, however, important individuals who allegedly aided the Muslims; Mansur b. Sarjun, the governor of Damascus, apparently wanted them to capture the city. It was his family that was to provide an array of talented administrators for the Umayyad caliphs. According to Brock, it is possible to gauge some of the attitudes of the Christian population towards the transfer of power to the Muslims.<sup>28</sup> The Syriac writers of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, relying on much earlier sources, notably Jacob of Edessa (d. 708) and Dionysius of Tell-Mahre (d. 845), reveal a sense of relief at the transition from Byzantine to Muslim rule after the disruptions of the Byzantine/Sasanian wars. Indeed, the Arab invasions are viewed primarily as punishment for the wickedness of Byzantine ecclesiastical policies.<sup>29</sup> An anonymous Nestorian source, dating from between 670 and 680, also shares a positive attitude to the conquerors, claiming that their victory has 'come from God'. How much such statements are attributable to a desire for survival and good relations with the Muslim newcomers it is difficult to say.

No clear-cut principle of succession was established during the reigns of the first four so-called 'Rightly-Guided' (*Rashidun*) caliphs of Islam. 'Umar's assassination in 644 plunged the community into a crisis which was not solved by the eventual emergence of 'Uthman as the compromise choice of the consultative council set up by the dying 'Umar to appoint his successor. With 'Uthman's accession, the Muslim state witnessed the growing dominance of the Meccan elite and, above all, the Umayyad clan, who, with the notable exception of 'Uthman himself, had been the Prophet's main opponents in his attempts to establish the new faith and community. 'Uthman's nepotistic policies, which placed his Umayyad relatives in key administrative posts, proved unpopular. However, not all the blame for internal turbulence can be placed at 'Uthman's door: his caliphate coincided with widespread dissatisfaction and unrest within

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Morony (1984), pp. 181ff.

<sup>28</sup> Brock (1982).

<sup>29</sup> Brock (1982).

the community. The slowing down of the conquests and concomitant booty, strife in the garrison towns, increasing support for the idea that the caliphate should be in the hands of the Prophet's blood relations (an idea particularly prevalent among the partisans of 'Ali – the so-called *Shi'at 'Ali*, hence the term Shi'ite) culminated in his murder in Medina in 656; the aged caliph was killed whilst reading the Qur'an. 'Uthman's death was a seminal event in the internal development of the community. 'Ali who had been bypassed for the caliphate on three preceding occasions finally took office but was to rule for only two turbulent years before he too was assassinated. 'Ali's impeccable religious credentials and his blood and marriage ties with Muhammad proved powerless to stem centrifugal forces within the community, especially the claims of 'Uthman's Umayyad relatives who demanded vengeance for his murder. The crisis culminated in civil war between 'Ali and the Umayyad faction, led by the talented governor of Syria, Mu'awiya, who had ruled the province since 'Umar's time. Within three decades of Muhammad's death, supreme power in the Islamic empire was now to pass to the Meccan Quraysh elite. The Umayyads ruled the empire from 661 to 750 and brought about substantial changes in Islamic government and society.

It is difficult to give a balanced view of the Umayyad period.<sup>30</sup> There are few extant contemporary sources and the dynasty's achievements have been distorted by the partisan accounts of the chroniclers of the 'Abbasids, their rivals who ousted them in the revolution of 750. Shi'ite groups roundly condemned the Umayyads as political usurpers rather than true theocratic rulers, alleging that they were mere 'kings' who had introduced the principle of hereditary succession into the *umma*. The Umayyads were also opposed by pietistic non-Shi'ite circles. So much can be gleaned from the sources. More recently, a process of re-evaluation has rightly shown the Umayyads to be the true architects of an international empire. The key figures in this process were Mu'awiya (661–680) and 'Abd al-Malik (685–705). During the Umayyad period the embryonic Islamic state was freed from the cultural yoke of the Byzantine and Sasanian empires and came of age: this process can be charted through contemporary numismatic, architectural and epigraphic evidence independently of the written sources which, despite their 'Abbasid bias, also confirm it.

Mu'awiya moved the capital to his power base, Damascus, an important urban centre in late antique times and strategically a more appropriate location from which to administer the enormous Islamic empire. In Damascus, the Arab Muslim governing elite lived close to the conquered Christian population from whose ranks they drew their high-level administrators. A symbiosis was created between Byzantine modes of government and society and new Islamic

<sup>30</sup> For a clear overview, Hawting (1986).

institutions. Muslims and Christians for a while shared the same buildings for religious worship. The caliphal court became the forum for open theological discussion between Christians and Muslims. Each side influenced the other and sharpened their polemical skills in debates before the caliph. By the reign of 'Abd al-Malik (685–705), self-confidence had grown to such an extent that a programme of religious monuments was initiated. The mosque had developed into a building type easily identifiable with the spread and triumph of Islam. The Umayyad Mosque of Damascus was a tangible sign of the religious prestige of Islam. Even more overt was the propagandistic significance of the Dome of the Rock, erected at the heart of the religious centres of Judaism and Christianity, Jerusalem, and decorated with Quranic inscriptions proclaiming the triumph of Islam. Arabic, the sacred vehicle through which God's final and perfect revelation had come to mankind, became the sole language of government and coinage. The Umayyad caliphs favoured Arab over non-Arab Muslim. Berber and Persian converts to Islam suffered discrimination and their disaffection with the regime grew as the seventh century progressed. The international aspects of the Islamic message, the brotherhood of man mentioned in the Qur'an, came to be emphasised, as the initial 'Arabness' of the revelation receded into the background. Islam was for Berber and Persian as well as Arab. This desire to redefine Islam contributed to the downfall of the Umayyad dynasty in 750.

The preceding pages have shown that, despite the early appearance of debilitating internal disputes about the nature of true succession to the Prophet, disputes which caused civil war and the violent deaths of caliphs, the waves of Islamic territorial conquests which had begun shortly before or after the death of Muhammad in 632 had created by 732 an enormous empire stretching from Spain to India and Central Asia. The Sasanian polity had been wiped out and Byzantium seriously diminished. The reasons for the success of the phenomenon of Arab Islamic expansion remain complex, but the irruption of nomadic forces out of the Arabian peninsula at the same time as the emergence of the Islamic revelation and the career of Muhammad points to the new faith as the mainspring of the inspirational leadership underpinning the military successes. Conquest was followed by consolidation, and in the Umayyad period a series of very gifted caliphs, based on Syria rather than Arabia, elaborated a government system capable of administering this vast empire. Arabic was now its *lingua franca* and Islam, a clearly identifiable new religion, was the faith of its ruling elite.

## ABBREVIATIONS

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<i>AASS</i>	<i>Acta Sanctorum quotquot toto orbe coluntur</i> , ed. J. Bollandus <i>et al.</i> , Antwerp and Brussels (1634–)
<i>AASS OSB</i>	<i>Acta Sanctorum Ordinis Sancti Benedicti</i> , ed. J. Mabillon, 9 vols., Paris (1668–1701)
<i>AfD</i>	<i>Archiv für Diplomatik</i>
<i>AHP</i>	<i>Archivum Historiae Pontificum</i>
<i>AHR</i>	<i>American Historical Review</i>
<i>An. Boll.</i>	<i>Analecta Bollandiana</i>
<i>Annales ESC</i>	<i>Annales: Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations</i>
<i>ARAM</i>	<i>ARAM</i> , Society for Syro-Mesopotamian Studies
<i>ASC</i>	<i>Anglo-Saxon Chronicle</i>
<i>ASE</i>	<i>Anglo-Saxon England</i>
<i>BAR</i>	British Archaeological Reports
<i>BBCS</i>	<i>Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies</i>
<i>BEC</i>	<i>Bibliothèque de l'Ecole des Chartes</i>
<i>Bede, HE</i>	<i>Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum</i>
<i>BHG</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca</i> , ed. F. Halkin, 3rd edn (Subsidia Hagiographica 8a), Brussels (1957) and <i>Novum Auctarium Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca</i> (Subsidia Hagiographica 65), Brussels (1984)
<i>BHL</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina</i> (Subsidia Hagiographica 6), Brussels (1898–1901), <i>Supplementum</i> (Subsidia Hagiographica 12), Brussels (1911); <i>Novum Supplementum</i> (Subsidia Hagiographica 70), Brussels (1986)
<i>BL</i>	<i>British Library</i>
<i>BMGS</i>	<i>Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies</i>
<i>BS/EB</i>	<i>Byzantine Studies/Etudes Byzantines</i>
<i>BSI</i>	<i>Byzantinoslavica</i>

BSOAS	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i>
Byz.	<i>Byzantion</i>
BZ	<i>Byzantinische Zeitschrift</i>
CBA	Council for British Archaeology
CC	<i>Codex Carolinus</i>
CCCC	Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS
CCCM	Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis, Turnhout (1966–)
CCE	<i>Cahiers de la Céramique Égyptienne</i>
CCSG	Corpus Christianorum Series Graeca
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum Series Latina, Turnhout (1952–)
CDL	<i>Codice Diplomatico Longobardo</i>
ChLA	<i>Chartae Latinae Antiquiores</i> , ed. A. Bruckner, facsimile edition of the Latin charters prior to the ninth century, Olten and Lausanne (1954–)
CIG	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum</i>
CIL	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i>
CLA	E. A. Lowe, <i>Codices Latini Antiquiores: A Palaeographical Guide to Latin Manuscripts Prior to the Ninth Century</i> , I–XI, plus Supplement, Oxford (1935–71)
CMCS	<i>Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies</i>
<i>Cod. Iust.</i>	<i>Codex Iustinianus</i>
<i>Cod. Theo.</i>	<i>Codex Theodosianus</i>
DA	<i>Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters</i>
DOP	<i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i>
DR	<i>Downside Review</i>
EC	<i>Études Celtiques</i>
EHD	<i>English Historical Documents</i>
EHR	<i>English Historical Review</i>
EME	<i>Early Medieval Europe</i>
fol.	<i>folio</i>
FrSt	<i>Frühmittelalterliche Studien</i>
GRBS	<i>Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies</i>
Gregory, <i>Epp.</i>	Gregory of Rome, <i>Registrum Epistolarum</i>
Gregory, <i>Hist.</i>	Gregory of Tours, <i>Decem Libri Historiarum</i>
HJb	<i>Historisches Jahrbuch</i>
HZ	<i>Historische Zeitschrift</i>
JEH	<i>Journal of Ecclesiastical History</i>
JESHO	<i>Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient</i>

<i>JHS</i>	<i>Journal of Hellenic Studies</i>
<i>JMH</i>	<i>Journal of Medieval History</i>
<i>JRA</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Archaeology</i>
<i>JRAS</i>	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
<i>JRH</i>	<i>Journal of Religious History</i>
<i>JRS</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>LP</i>	<i>Liber Pontificalis</i>
<i>LV</i>	<i>Lex Visigothorum</i>
<i>MGH</i>	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica</i>
AA	<i>Auctores Antiquissimi</i> , 15 vols., Berlin (1877–1919)
Cap.	<i>Capitularia, Legum sectio II, Capitularia Regum Francorum</i> , ed. A. Boretius and V. Krause, 2 vols., Hanover (1883–97)
Epp.	<i>Epistolae Merowingici et Karolini Aevi</i> , Hanover (1892–1939)
Epp. Sel.	<i>Epistolae Selectae in Usus Scholarum</i> , 5 vols., Hanover (1887–91)
Form.	<i>Formulae Merowingici et Karolini Aevi</i> , ed. K. Zeumer, <i>Legum sectio V</i> , Hanover (1886)
SRG	<i>Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum in Usus Scholarum Separatim Editi</i> , 63 vols., Hanover (1871–1987)
SRL	<i>Scriptores Rerum Langobardicarum et Italicarum saec. VI–IX</i> , ed. G. Waitz, Hanover (1878)
SRM	<i>Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum</i> , ed. B. Krusch and W. Levison, 7 vols., Hanover (1885–1920)
SS	<i>Scriptores in folio</i> , 30 vols., Hanover (1824–1924)
MIÖG	<i>Mitteilung des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung</i>
MS	Manuscript
NF	Neue Folge
NMS	<i>Nottingham Medieval Studies</i>
Paul the Deacon, HL	<i>Historia Langobardorum</i>
PBA	<i>Proceedings of the British Academy</i>
PBSR	<i>Papers of the British School at Rome</i>
PG	<i>Patrologia Cursus Completus, Series Graeca</i> , ed. J. P. Migne, 161 vols., Paris (1857–66)
PL	<i>Patrologia Cursus Completus, Series Latina</i> , ed. J. P. Migne, 221 vols., Paris (1841–64)
PRIA	<i>Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy</i>



<i>RAC</i>	<i>Reallexicon für Antike und Christentum</i>
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue Bénédictine</i>
<i>REB</i>	<i>Revue des Etudes Byzantines</i>
<i>RHE</i>	<i>Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique</i>
<i>RHEF</i>	<i>Revue d'Histoire de l'Eglise de France</i>
<i>RHM</i>	<i>Römische Historische Mitteilungen</i>
<i>RHPbR</i>	<i>Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses</i>
<i>RN</i>	<i>Revue Numismatique</i>
<i>s.a.</i>	<i>sub anno</i>
<i>Settimane</i>	<i>Settimane di Studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, Spoleto (1954–)</i>
<i>SI</i>	<i>Studia Islamica</i>
<i>SM</i>	<i>Studi Medievali</i>
<i>TRHS</i>	<i>Transactions of the Royal Historical Society</i>
<i>VuF</i>	Vorträge und Forschungen, herausgegeben vom Konstanzer Arbeitskreis für mittelalterliche Geschichte
<i>ZKTh</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Katholische Theologie</i>
<i>ZRG</i>	<i>Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte</i>
<i>GA</i>	<i>Germanistische Abteilung</i>
<i>KA</i>	<i>Kanonistische Abteilung</i>
<i>RA</i>	<i>Romanistische Abteilung</i>

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